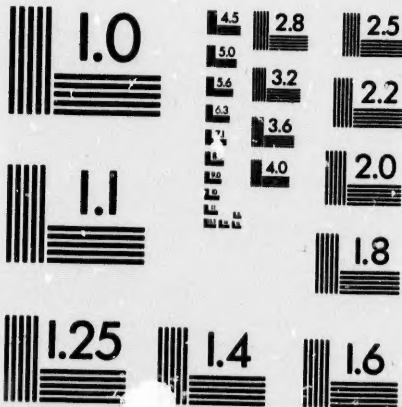


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SERMON

PREACHED IN KNOX CHURCH, HAMILTON,

JULY 26th, 1876,

BY THE

REV. W. H. RENNELSON, M.A.

SERMON,

PREACHED IN

Knox Church, Hamilton,

JULY 25TH, 1875,

BY THE

REV. W. H. RENNELSON, M.A.

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

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Many of the members of Knox Church have expressed a wish to see the last sermon preached to them by their late Pastor. To gratify that wish, and not at all for general distribution, the last written sermon has been published, that each family in the Congregation may possess a copy.

It was written hastily, while suffering from illness, and many will see it is merely an outline of the sermon as spoken to them. But in the light of the present, the subject seems singularly appropriate as his last words from the pulpit to his people.

SERMON.

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FUTURE.

I. John 3: 2.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

One of the German poets has a passage as remarkable as it is beautiful, in which he represents men as gazing into the future with most anxious, questioning eye. A black, impenetrable curtain overhangs its portals; and though nothing can be seen nor even heard, the generations of men have appeared before that curtain with torches in hand, trying to peer into that which lies behind. They have seen nothing but their own shadows thrown upon the screen. Deep, everlasting silence reigns within. None of those who have passed beyond will ever answer those who have been left without. No matter how eagerly you press for an answer you

will hear nothing more than the echo of your own voice, as if you shouted into a chasm. And yet behind that veil we all must pass.

What lies in the future is a very natural question for us all to ask. There must be few persons indeed, who in their thoughtful moments do not speculate on the problem of what they will be, when time has emptied itself into eternity. Whether your mind approaches the subject with hope or with fear, it is in either case fraught with interests that touch the heart very deeply. He who trembles knows not how much reason there is for fear. He who hopes knows not how manifold and how secure are his reasons for hope. The whole subject, too, casts its reflection over the lives of men, as does the mountain its shadow over the adjoining valley. But believe that there is an eternity, and you cannot escape from its mighty influence. It casts either cheer or gloom over every pathway by which mortals are advancing toward it. Its decisions are unchangeable and its awards so momentous that we may not wonder if we find every where eager questioners with their torches trying to see through the veil.

And yet how little we know ! How closely God has drawn the curtains. No voice has ever sounded out of the darkness. John was permitted to look through the gate of bliss ; but having no fit

language in which to tell us what he saw, we are left largely to imagine still. Paul was taken within the gates ; but what he saw and heard, " it was not lawful for man to utter." Lazarus had four days' experience, but though he came again he told it not.

" Behold a man raised up by Christ ;
The rest remaineth unrevealed,
He told it not ; or something sealed
The lips of the Evangelist."

Our Knowledge of the Future Condition of the Believer.

I. It is exceedingly limited.

The Apostle regards the future from the standpoint of the present. The foundation on which he stands is the truth—" Now are we the sons of God." That truth naturally leads the mind to the future ; for sonship implies an inheritance. How can he be a son of God without a share in the family glory ? But we are not to expect the full inheritance until this life is over. What then is to be the glory hereafter ? What is to be our possession, and what are we ourselves to be when the coming glory shines full upon us ?

The Apostle meets the question with the statement that " It has never yet been manifested what we shall be." We know not even where heaven will be ; we know not in what form we shall ap-

pear ; for we know not what is meant by a spiritual body ; nor have we any knowledge of the language we shall speak—whether like that of earth, or some higher language of spirits. But most incomprehensible of all is the glorious experience of being possessed of a sinless heart. While the unceasing joy that will course through the soul is part of those things which have never “ entered into the heart of man.”

There are sufficient reasons, too, why the heavenly condition should not be manifested now.

Mature thought will make evident to us the wisdom of Christ in maintaining silence upon all this matter. Pictures of heaven are an artifice which one would quickly seize upon as a powerful way of influencing the mind. Mohammed adopted this plan, and in it lay the power which gave such success to his teachings. The Church of Rome, whose religion is far more earthly than spiritual, has done the same thing. Jesus Christ left the glories of His Father's Kingdom all untold. There was no language, intelligible by us, in which to tell them. Whoever tries to picture heaven must do so in the language and symbols of earth. And no matter how pure the symbols, they must ever fail of their purpose. One has but to read the Revelation of John to realize how impossible it is fully to set forth

spiritual ideas by means of material imagery. All earthly symbolism must fail to represent the glory of the future inheritance.

And as no language can be found, so if we had a language, the intellect would fail to comprehend it. We can understand only as far as we have had experience.

(I. The present ignorance is favourable to the growth of faith.)

II. We know enough to make heaven a place of glad anticipation.

One can well imagine the feeling of triumphant joy with which the Apostle penned that sentence : "We know that we shall be like Him." There is much, it is to be confessed, of which we are in entire ignorance. But this much we do know. And there is not the beginning of an admission that this knowledge is of trifling importance. John has an evident pleasure in surprising us with the essential completeness of the knowledge of which we are in possession : "We shall be like Him."

This is knowledge of which there is no uncertainty. "We know," is the expression for that which is of absolute certainty. It is a good thing, amid all the uncertainties of life, and the weakness of human faith to hear one who has received his instructions from the Centre of Truth saying—"We

know." Like a vessel which has been tossed by the storm, and at last feels its anchor holding, is the soul, which, amid abounding unbelief, rests upon a declaration of God, and feels that the foundation is sure.

But who knows what it is to be "like Him?" Adam knew, but we do not. "No man hath seen God at any time," and faith cannot tell us. Moreover we know nothing of the mode in which a spirit exists apart from the body. And even did we know that, our most powerful imagining will tell us little of what it is to be like the glorified One.

We may, however, approximate to the idea here set forth, by considering in what respect we are unlike God; and remembering that the likeness of God was stamped upon the first of our race, we will easily perceive that the essential point of unlikeness is the presence of sin in the believer's heart. "We shall be like Him." Sin and all the evils of which it is the parent, are to be removed. We shall know good as God knows it,—as filling the heart with all its affections and motives. We shall know no temptation, for there shall be there nothing that "defileth or maketh a lie." We shall know sin, too, as God knows it,—knowing as we can never know here, its fearful consequences—

knowing it moreover in its own inherent hatefulness. Satan spoke more truth than he knew, when he said, "Ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil." God knew evil as having driven from His presence a section of His angelic creation. Man had never known it but for his falling under it. Hereafter he shall know it as delivered from it and standing above it. "We shall be like Him."

And if the mind requires help to embrace the idea of God, and make it comprehensible—then we have Christ who is the "brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of his person."

Now think of it. This blessing is in store for every sinner saved by Christ. We were like devils when He found us. "We shall be like *Him* when He appears."

There is a reason given here for the likeness, which lets us deep into the philosophy of heaven, "We shall be like Him because we shall *see Him as He is*." The same writer tells us in the Apocalypse that in glory they shall see His face." What kind of sight that will be, is a problem too great for us now. Whether in the glorified body we shall have eyes which can look upon splendour ineffable, and recognize the features of the Eternal, we cannot say. More likely will that sight be such as Christ meant when he said, "The pure in heart

shall see God." There is a vision of the heart by which purity recognizes purity.

This sight will be true, just as the eye in certain diseases must see falsely, so do we see God partially, and not without error. With a corrected heart-vision, we shall see Him truly, as well as more fully "as He is."

We shall see Him, and as we gaze shall result a marvellous transfiguration of ourselves. Paul represents the sinner as looking through a veil at God ; but the Christian with open face as beholding Him in a mirror. And though He is seen only as in a dark and imperfect mirror : he who gazes becomes changed into the same image. There is the process. How the result is achieved we cannot fully tell. It is the Spirit's work.

The day will soon be upon us, when mirrors will be of no more use. And as the Spirit leads us up in triumph to meet the Lord at His coming, we shall gaze right at the Throne and Him who is upon it, and shall find that we are like Him."

Nor let any one think that this knowledge is of any mean importance. Some minds may run off on such a track as this. "This likeness is all very good in itself, but it would have been more encouraging if we had been told something more definite about what God will do for us, and what will be the nature of our joys."

"But likeness to Christ implies far more than the mere honour of exhibiting the family lineaments. It implies all that it is essential to heaven. What is heaven to any one's thoughts, if it be not a state of unalloyed purity? You need not enumerate any of the resulting blessings. Make him like God, and by necessity it follows that his whole nature will be in delightful harmony with itself and with God."

All the questions that men eagerly ask—*e. g.* Where is heaven? Shall we know each other there? Will it be a walled city with streets of gold? Or will there be green fields and waving forests and crystal streams? are interesting enough; but, as compared with the information of the text, utterly unimportant. Make a man pure, and he will be happy either in city or forest. Make him like God, and his joys are above disturbances. It is what you *will be* that will make heaven for you. Be what you should, and be like him," and all the rest is only the drapery of Heaven's walls.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.

1.—There are some persons oppressed with the thought of the indefiniteness of heaven, they fancy it is to be some kind of dreamy existence of unending ease; or, again, that it is to be a too prolonged

strain of voices and harps, that cease not day nor night ; or, again, that it will be so etherealized that every sort of present feeling will be excluded. But Christ is there with His human nature, and every ransomed one will bear, too, His human nature—made like unto the divine. And the gladness and joy of that sinless world will be such as Christ sought everywhere to shed around Him on earth. And if God has adopted us into His family, and intends to call us a family, we may be sure the happiness will be such as children can enjoy.

2.—We see that the rewards of heaven will not consist in what we shall *receive*, but what we *shall be*. Heaven is not for the selfish, who will only work for a prize, but for those who seek purity because they love it for its own sake.

Here is a test which tries every one of us. Will you seek God for what *He is*, or must it be for something which He will *give* ?

3.—How does this knowledge bear on life ? You have the two ends of the journey fixed. You begin as a son of God : You end in complete likeness to Him. Now, as the ploughman sets up his stakes, or the builder stretches his line, so should our aim be determined. Where is the line of your life to run—in the place of respectable

worldliness, or in ever-growing purity towards the Father's presence, where you will at last "*see Him as He is ?*"

I began with an imaginary picture by a German poet. Let me close with a real picture from the Book of God. Out from behind that curtain which hides the unseen, came, in bodily form, the Son of God. He returned again, and left His disciples gazing up into heaven, as "a cloud received Him out of their sight." Angelic messengers came to the gates and said, "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." One of those very men who gazed into heaven that day, did afterwards hear a message from within, and has given it to us. "Ye know that we shall be like Him, *for we shall see Him as He is.*"

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